

(12) INTERNATIONAL APPLICATION PUBLISHED UNDER THE PATENT COOPERATION TREATY (PCT)

(19) World Intellectual Property Organization
International Bureau



(43) International Publication Date
22 March 2001 (22.03.2001)

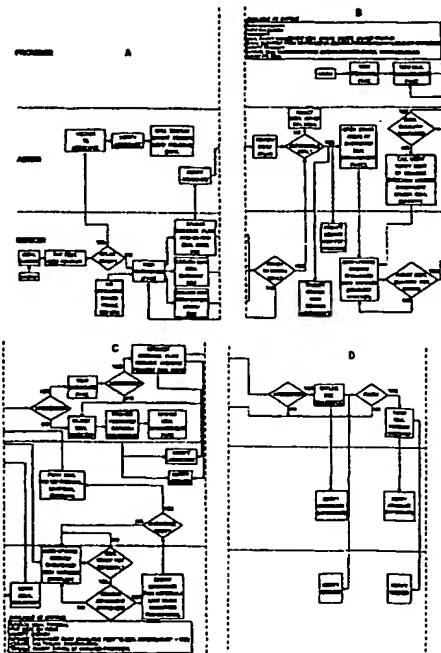
PCT

(10) International Publication Number
WO 01/20523 A1

- (51) International Patent Classification⁷: G06F 17/60
- (21) International Application Number: PCT/US00/25284
- (22) International Filing Date:
15 September 2000 (15.09.2000)
- (25) Filing Language: English
- (26) Publication Language: English
- (30) Priority Data:
60/154,104 15 September 1999 (15.09.1999) US
09/633,004 15 September 2000 (15.09.2000) US
- (63) Related by continuation (CON) or continuation-in-part (CIP) to earlier application:
US 60/154,104 (CIP)
Filed on 15 September 1999 (15.09.1999)
- (71) Applicant (for all designated States except US): VENTURE CAPITAL ONLINE, LLC [US/US]; 303 West Madison Street, Suite 1110, Chicago, IL 60606-3309 (US).
- (72) Inventors; and
(75) Inventors/Applicants (for US only): VITALE, Benjamin, A. [US/US]; 505 E. Lake Shore Drive, Barrington, IL 60010 (US). FREDERICK, Jordan, E. [US/US]; 230 Crest Vista Drive, San Francisco, CA 94127 (US). STARR, David [US/US]; 1560 Sandburg Terrace #3508, Chicago, IL 60610 (US). BATTERSON, Len [US/US]; 100 Crescent Drive, Glencoe, IL 60022 (US).
- (74) Agents: FIESELER, Robert, W. et al.; McAndrews Held & Malloy, Ltd., 500 W. Madison Street, Suite 3400, Chicago, IL 60661 (US).
- (81) Designated States (national): AE, AG, AL, AM, AT, AU, AZ, BA, BB, BG, BR, BY, BZ, CA, CH, CN, CR, CU, CZ, DE, DK, DM, DZ, EE, ES, FI, GB, GD, GE, GH, GM, HR, HU, ID, IL, IN, IS, JP, KE, KG, KP, KR, KZ, LC, LK, LR, LS, LT, LU, LV, MA, MD, MG, MK, MN, MW, MX, MZ, NO, NZ, PL, PT, RO, RU, SD, SE, SG, SI, SK, SL, TJ, TM, TR, TT, TZ, UA, UG, US, UZ, VN, YU, ZA, ZW.

[Continued on next page]

(54) Title: METHOD AND SYSTEM FOR MATCHING PURCHASERS AND SUPPLIERS



(57) Abstract: The present method and system is a vertical portal for entrepreneurs and business owners, and for their investors, and for professional service providers who sell to entrepreneurs, business owners, and investors. At the core of the present method and system is a membership-based exchange of leading capital providers that offer financing to an online community of entrepreneurs and business owners.

WO 01/20523 A1



(84) Designated States (regional): ARIPO patent (GH, GM, KE, LS, MW, MZ, SD, SL, SZ, TZ, UG, ZW), Eurasian patent (AM, AZ, BY, KG, KZ, MD, RU, TJ, TM), European patent (AT, BE, CH, CY, DE, DK, ES, FI, FR, GB, GR, IE, IT, LU, MC, NL, PT, SE), OAPI patent (BF, BJ, CF, CG, CI, CM, GA, GN, GW, ML, MR, NE, SN, TD, TG).

Published:

— With international search report.

For two-letter codes and other abbreviations, refer to the "Guidance Notes on Codes and Abbreviations" appearing at the beginning of each regular issue of the PCT Gazette.

**METHOD AND SYSTEM FOR MATCHING
PURCHASERS AND SUPPLIERS**

5 Cross-Reference to Related Application

 This application relates to and claims priority
benefits from U.S. Provisional Patent Application Serial
No. 60/154,104 filed September 15, 1999, entitled "Method
And System For Matching Purchasers And Suppliers", which
10 is incorporated by reference herein in its entirety.

Field of the Invention

 The present invention is directed to a method and
system for facilitating the financing of business
15 ventures between two or more parties through the use of
electronic networks.

Background of the Invention

 The present system and method offer a new way for
20 business financial transactions to be conducted.
Although there are large amounts of private capital
available, and large numbers of promising companies
seeking funding, the traditional process of matching
investor preferences with appropriate opportunities is
25 highly inefficient. One reputable research company
estimates that there is currently a \$17 billion capital
gap (available capital that is not matched with available
opportunities) due to inefficiencies in the current
capital raising process.

30 These inefficiencies are the result of numerous

problems with the current manual private equity raising process. One such problem is the lack of any ability to match the characteristics of capital seekers with the investment preferences of capital providers. This results in a waste of time to both entrepreneurs and investors, as entrepreneurs frequently end up making unneeded presentations of their ideas to investors whose interests lie elsewhere.

Another deficiency in the existing process is the lack of any ability for individual entrepreneurs to reach multiple potential investors with a single presentation.

Venture capital is, instead, fragmented, resulting in entrepreneurs having to make repeated presentations to reach any appreciable percentage of the venture capital market.

An additional problem with the existing capital raising process is that capital seekers receive little education and feedback as they proceed through the process. This results in an information disparity in favor of capital providers that gives them an edge in negotiating deals. Further lacking in the existing process is an automated way for a capital seeker or capital provider to find additional providers interested in syndicating a deal. The existing manual process requires the seeker or provider to maintain a list of contacts and to telephone each contact individually to determine who may be interested in the deal.

Existing processes also lack tracking and security capabilities that can protect the capital seeker. In many of the listing services currently available, the

seeker does not know who is reviewing his proposal and has little ability to prevent specific providers from reviewing the deal.

Capital seekers and providers also lack an automated way to find additional providers interested in syndicating a deal. Current listing services simply post a deal and cannot enable syndication of a deal between interested parties. Current methods also do not provide capital seekers with information and feedback on the status of their financing. Listing services frequently do not issue turndown memos or improvement suggestions.

Thus, a need exists to better bridge the gaps between those seeking capital and those with capital to provide.

Summary of the Invention

The present system and method are designed to address the inefficiencies of traditional private capital markets. With a large membership base of member capital providers, the present system and method can bring a significant portion of the global private-capital "bank" to the market as a single point of entry. Consequently, entrepreneurs can now address interested exchange members all at once, and in a manner that is tightly targeted to the preferences of those members, instead of presenting their business opportunities to capital providers one at a time in the traditional manner. The process is equally well-suited to matching interested parties (and/or the brokers representing them) in the areas of leveraged buy-outs and mergers and acquisitions.

The front-end of the capital raising process includes the marketing of the capital provider organizations, the completion of a comprehensive business plan, the development of a capital raising strategy, and the proper targeting of professional service providers to assist the business, and access to a number of appropriate investors.

Previously, there had been no industry-accepted standard process to efficiently complete the front-end stages of this investment process. To meet this need, procedures, processes, and online documents have been developed, based on a combination of the most effective and efficient industry-accepted practices. To ensure industry-wide acceptance, the processes and supporting documents are designed to be standard but flexible to apply to various types of businesses and situations.

It typically takes between twenty weeks and fifty-two weeks to complete the front-end stages of the investment process. The present system and method in combination with an exclusive network of investors and large amounts of investment data reduce this critical time substantially. The key efficiencies are the result of a unique use of the Internet, comprehensive information, and the explicit requirements for the database-driven automation of the present system and method, all of which can be combined for use with an exchange of investors, business owners and professional service providers.

To further aid in building the global capital provider network, the present system and method include

enhanced features and benefits, including consistent, high-quality deal flow, streamlined front-end process and administration, and other tiered services. One such tiered service, a private-label service, provides features that use the present system and method, coupled with another web site, to process and track deal flow sent directly to members electronically and via traditional mechanisms.

Notable features of the present system and method include (1) database-driven interactive interfaces for the matching of capital-seeking companies with capital and professional service providers; (2) database-driven, interactive interfaces for the creation, submission, and qualification of business plan summaries that can be referred to capital and professional service providers online; (3) a password protected area for capital and professional service providers to access and review the referred investment opportunities; and (4) a standardized but flexible mechanism for capital and professional service providers to act upon, manage and communicate with potential investment candidates.

The initial stage of the exchange process is enabled by an intelligent database that automatically screens investment opportunities and matches them with capital providers based upon their investment preferences and prior successful investments. Interactive interfaces and templates are then used to support the dynamic creation and submission of concise and uniform summaries of the investment opportunities. Alternatively, this step can be carried out manually, utilizing the expertise of the

entity controlling the matching process.

A real-time, interactive text and graphical based interface is also tightly integrated into the present system and method to help insure that investment
5 summaries are properly completed. Submitted summaries may be manually or automatically reviewed for matching with capital provider specific criteria, and complete and consistent summaries can be digitally referred.

As can be seen, the present method is superior to
10 existing methods of matching capital seekers and providers (to the extent such current methods can be said to even exist). The present method matches the characteristics of the capital seeker with the investment preferences of the capital provider. This reduces the
15 time the entrepreneur searches for appropriate providers, and reduces the effort required by capital providers, who now must only review deals that match their preferences..

By assembling a large percentage of the entire venture capital market in a single place, an entrepreneur can
20 save time by presenting his plan to many potential capital providers simultaneously. This also reduces the number of unpalatable deals referred to providers for review and provides a tracked and secure method that protects the capital seeker. The present method provides
25 a significant amount of content and services to educate the capital seekers and feedback that has not previously been available. The capital seeker will now have knowledge of who is reviewing his proposal and will have the ability to prevent certain providers from reviewing
30 the deal. A level of automation is provided for allowing

a capital seeker or capital provider to find additional providers interested in syndicating a deal. By the method of the present invention, capital seekers can receive information and feedback on the status of their financing not previously available.

Brief Description of the Drawings

FIG. 1 is a flow-chart of the matching system according to the invention.

FIGS. 2a-2c are flow-charts of the Provider's Interface for the matching system of FIG. 1.

FIGS. 3a-3g are flow-charts of the Entrepreneur's Interface for the matching system of FIG. 1.

Detailed Description of the Invention

The present method and system utilises a computer system to facilitate the matching of capital seeking companies and individuals with capital and service providers. Although the present system and method can be used in connection with other applications, for the purposes of illustration, the capital seeker/provider example is used throughout the specification.

FIG. 1 shows a broad overview of the entire process of the preferred embodiment, as explained below.

FIGS. 2a-2c illustrate a preferred embodiment of the present invention from the investor's perspective. Referring to FIG. 2a, an interested provider (IP) enters the system in one of two ways. The IP may enter the system online by filling out a "Join the Network" form, in step 200, which may include basic information such as

contact name, address, telephone number, type of deal
interested in (that is, Venture Capital, Mergers and
Acquisitions, Buyouts), and investor type (that is, Angel
Group, Corporate Venture Groups, Family Venture Groups,
5 Female-Focused Venture Capital Firms, Financial Buyer,
Financial Institution, Financial Institution Venture
Groups, Government Supported Venture Group, Hedge Fund,
Incubator, Individual Angel, Minority-Focused Venture
Capital Firms, Private Management Firms, Public
10 Management Firms, Small Business Investment Companies,
Strategic Buyer, VC Firm, Venture Leasing Firms), amount
of active capital, capital under management, source of
capital, and fee structure. An IP may also enter the
system as shown in step 202 by being added by an
15 Administrator.

As shown in step 204, IPs are then sorted based upon
the type of exchange the IP is interested in and routed
to a Provider Associate who concentrates in that type of
exchange. In one embodiment, the IP is routed to either
20 a VC Provider Associate (as in step 206), a Professional
Service Provider (PSP) Associate (as in step 208), or a
Mergers & Acquisitions (M&A) Provider Associate (as in
step 210).

The relevant Associate then researches the IP and
25 contacts the IP as shown in step 212. In step 214 the
Associate completes a Provider Recommendation form and
includes an acceptance decision. In step 216, the IP is
judged against automatic acceptance requirements set by
the Administrator. If the IP meets the automatic
30 acceptance requirements, the IP is flagged as accepted by

the system as shown in step 218.

If at step 216 the IP does not meet the automatic acceptance requirements, the Provider Recommendation form is submitted to an Exchange Manager for review as in step 220. If the Exchange Manager does not agree with the Associate's recommendation, the recommendation is declined as in step 222 and the Associate is notified with feedback as in step 224. If the Exchange Manager agrees with the Associate's recommendation, the recommendation is accepted as in step 226. The IP may then either be accepted, in which case the IP is flagged as accepted by the system as shown in step 218, or rejected, in which case the firm is coded as "rejected" by the Exchange Manager as shown in step 228. As further shown in step 228, feedback is compiled and given to the rejected IP.

An IP that has been accepted (as shown in step 218) is notified of acceptance as shown in step 230. As also shown in step 230, the Exchange Manager is notified of an accepted IP. The process then continues as shown in FIG. 2b.

Referring to FIG. 2b, an accepted IP next completes a showcase as shown in step 232. In a preferred embodiment, the showcase is a multimedia presentation (for example, Microsoft PowerPoint, Evoke (www.evoke.com), Brainshark (www.brainshark.com)) "showcasing" the IP and capable of being viewed remotely by the Administrator or an entrepreneur. If after a certain amount of time has passed and the IP has failed to submit a showcase, an Associate follows up with the IP

and offers assistance, as shown in step 234. As further shown in step 234, the Associate may help complete the showcase for the IP.

5 Once a showcase has been submitted, it is reviewed for appropriateness by an Associate as shown in step 236.

If the showcase is found unacceptable, the Associate provides the IP with feedback as shown in step 238. Otherwise, the Associate approves the showcase and activates the IP's account as shown in step 240. In step 10 242, both the Exchange Manager and the IP are notified of the account activation.

An Associate then completes an orientation with the IP as shown in step 244. The IP then unsuspends its account and becomes eligible to receive deals from the 15 deal flow, as illustrated in FIG. 2c.

Referring to FIG. 2c, a deal is referred to the accepted IP as shown in step 246. The IP then preferences the deal as shown in step 248. Options for the IP could include requesting a meeting with the 20 entrepreneur (step 250), syndicating or participating in syndication with other firms (step 252), reviewing or requesting a due diligence investigation (step 254), reviewing the entrepreneur's showcase or business plan (step 256), or turning down the deal (step 258). When an 25 option is selected, the activity is recorded by the system as shown in step 260.

If the IP preferences the deal as in step 250, 252, or 254, however, the deal is examined to see whether it has achieved "featured" status in step 262. (See FIG. 3g 30 and the accompanying discussion, infra, for a more

complete description of the "featured deal" process.) If the deal is not a featured deal, the Associate assigned to that IP is notified of the deal request as shown in step 264. The Provider Associate may then call the IP in
5 five days for a follow-up as in step 266.

If at step 262 the deal is one that is currently a featured deal, the applicable Industry Analyst is notified of the request as in step 268. The Industry Analyst may then call the IP in five days for a follow-up
10 as in step 270.

FIGS. 3a-3g illustrate a preferred embodiment of the present invention from the entrepreneur's perspective. Referring to FIG. 3a, an entrepreneur enrolls in the venture capital exchange as shown in step 300. In step
15 302, the entrepreneur is assigned Deal Team Members (for example, an Associate and an Analyst) based on the Industry to which the entrepreneur's deal pertains. The entrepreneur then proceeds based upon whether he has prepared a business plan, as shown in step 304. If not,
20 the assigned Analyst calls the customer for an initial orientation as shown in step 306. If the entrepreneur does have a business plan, he proceeds to step 310.

By way of example, entrepreneurs could enter the system with a variety of business profiles. One profile
25 would consist of hyper-growth companies focusing on new technologies, innovative ideas, or emerging industries. Such companies might be in the midst of accelerating sales from \$0 to more than \$75 million within a few years. Companies in this category generally have an
30 innovative product or service that will revolutionize an

industry or create a new market. Preferred industries include information technology, healthcare, and e-commerce. Target markets should be sufficiently large to create a \$50-\$100 million business within 3-5 years.

5 These businesses are generally seeking venture capital since excess cash flow does not exist to service debt and operating expenses.

10 A second profile of steadily evolving companies that are fully matured and established, with a proven product or service and national focus. Companies in this category generally have a proven product or service and an established customer base. These mature companies are typically profitable with stable operating margins. They may also have significant market share in their
15 particular niche. These businesses may be seeking equity or debt financing to fund internal growth or complete acquisitions. Owners may also be interested in selling all or a portion of the business for liquidity reasons, or in using the business as a platform to execute a
20 consolidation strategy.

Another type of business that might seek the matching services of the present invention might be small businesses that are locally focused and have a maximum market potential of about \$10 million. Examples include
25 a small family-owned manufacturing company or local restaurant chain. Companies in this category are generally operated by a sole proprietor with few employees. These businesses may also include individual franchisees. Such companies are generally seeking debt
30 financing to fund startup or internal growth. Owners may

also be interested in selling all or a portion of the business for liquidity reason.

5 A fourth type of business might consist of companies that have a viable product or service but have become financially troubled. This type of company has found itself in a position with operational or financial difficulties. These companies require capital to execute a revised business plan or are in need of assistance from experts in the area of turnaround assistance.

10 Returning now to FIG. 3a, if at step 304 the entrepreneur had no prepared business plan and no business plan is received from the entrepreneur following the orientation telephone call in step 306, the entrepreneur is alerted every three weeks of the
15 deficiency until a business plan is received or a Vcapital Summary is submitted as shown in step 308. A Vcapital Summary (sometimes used interchangeably with the term iDeal Summary) is a concise synopsis of the entrepreneur's proposed venture and contains only the
20 most pertinent information from his complete business plan. The iDeal Summary highlights key information in a standardized format, allowing investors to quickly get to the heart of the investment opportunity. From step 308, the process proceeds as illustrated in FIG. 3b.

25 If a business plan is received, the Analyst reviews the deal information and completes a Recommendation Form as shown in step 310. In step 314, the Analyst submits the Recommendation Form to the Associate for review. If the Associate does not agree with the recommendation, the
30 Associate sends comments and questions on the deal back

to the Analyst as shown in step 314. If necessary, the Analyst (by email) or the Associate (by telephone) obtains more information from the entrepreneur as shown in step 316. The process then starts again at step 310.

5

When the Associate agrees with the recommendation, the recommendation is accepted as shown in step 318. The deal is then examined in step 320 to determine whether it is referable to investors. If not, the deal is coded as "not referable" by the Analyst, and feedback and assistance are compiled and provided to the entrepreneur as shown in step 322. An evaluation is then made as to whether the customer should be refunded. If a refund is approved, the Associate or Analyst completes the refund process as shown in step 324. If no refund is approved, the entrepreneur remains "paid but not referable" and must take further action to become active again in the process, as shown in step 326.

If a deal is found to be referable in step 320, it is coded as "referable" by the Analyst and directions on completing a Vcapital Summary are provided to the entrepreneur as shown in step 328. The entrepreneur then has access to PSP information, multimedia presentation information (for example, Microsoft PowerPoint, Evoke (www.evoke.com), Brainshark (www.brainshark.com)), and additional showcase items as shown in step 330. The process then continues as shown in FIG. 3b.

Referring to FIG. 3b, an entrepreneur completes a Vcapital Summary as shown in step 332. If after five days a Vcapital Summary has not been submitted, the

30

Analyst is notified and contacts the entrepreneur to offer assistance as shown in step 334.

5 Once a Vcapital Summary has been submitted, the deal is examined to see if a "referable" determination has previously been made, as shown in step 336. If a "referable" analysis has not previously been initiated, the process continues according to steps 310-330 of FIG. 3a. If the deal emerges from these steps as referable, the entrepreneur continues at step 338. If at step 336
10 it is determined that a "referable" analysis was previously conducted and the deal was found to be referable, the entrepreneur continues to step 338.

15 As shown in step 338, the Analyst or Associate reviews the iDeal Summary for completeness. The process then continues as illustrated in FIG. 3c.

20 Referring to FIG. 3c, if the entrepreneur's iDeal Summary is not complete, the degree of the required changes are evaluated as shown in step 340. If the changes are minor, the Analyst marks the iDeal Summary as incomplete and provides the entrepreneur with suggested changes, as shown in step 342. If the changes are not minor, the Associate marks the summary as incomplete and sends suggested revisions to the entrepreneur, as shown in step 344. Step 344 may additionally entail a
25 telephone call to the entrepreneur. After completing either step 342 or 344, the entrepreneur revises his iDeal summary and re-submits it as shown in step 346. If the entrepreneur does not re-submit his iDeal Summary, the Analyst follows up with him weekly until there is a
30 submission, as shown in step 348.

Once the revised iDeal summary has been submitted, the Analyst or Associate reviews it, focusing on the areas highlighted in the last review, as shown in step 350. If the summary remains incomplete, the process is reinitiated at step 340. Otherwise, the Associate marks the iDeal Summary as complete as shown in step 352. (An entrepreneur also reaches this point if after step 338 in FIG. 3b his summary is found to be complete.) The entrepreneur then completes his showcase as shown in step 354. If after that time the entrepreneur fails to submit his showcase, the Analyst follows up with him weekly until there is a submission, as shown in step 356. Once the showcase is submitted, the process continues as illustrated in FIG. 3d.

Referring to FIG. 3d, the entrepreneur's interest in multimedia aspects of his showcase is evaluated in step 358. If the entrepreneur has expressed such interest, the process proceeds as shown in FIG. 3e. If no interest is expressed, the Analyst reviews the showcase items for appropriateness or reasonableness for referral, as shown in step 360.

If the showcase is found to be not acceptable, the Analyst provides the entrepreneur with feedback on his showcase, as shown in step 362. The deal is then returned to "iDeal Summary Complete" status as shown in step 364. The entrepreneur updates his showcase and re-submits it for review as shown in step 366. The process then reinitiates at step 360.

If at step 360 the showcase is found acceptable, the Analyst marks the showcase as referable as shown in step

368. The Analyst then verifies the applicable match criteria and updates these criteria if necessary as shown in step 370. The Associate performs a final review of the deal for referable status, including a verification of the match criteria, as shown in step 372.

If the deal is not found to be acceptable for referral, the Associate contacts the entrepreneur as shown in step 374 and discusses the reasons why the deal is not referable. The entrepreneur then makes the necessary changes to the showcase or iDeal Summary as shown in step 376. In step 378, the deal is reevaluated and if again not found referable, the process restarts at step 374.

If the deal is ultimately found referable, the Associate refers the deal to the relevant IPs as shown in step 380. At this stage, custom matching is available to the Associate so that he can deselect firms whose preferences do not match this deal.

FIG. 3e illustrates two options that might be pursued by an entrepreneur who has expressed interest in multimedia at step 358 in FIG. 3d. As shown in step 301, once an entrepreneur's deal has been coded as referable, the entrepreneur may sign up for a self-published multimedia presentation service such as Brainshark as in step 303. (Evoke Communications provides a similar webcasting service.) The Analyst then creates a Brainshark account for the entrepreneur as shown in step 305. The Analyst records a conference identification or personal identification number (PIN) in the database as shown in step 307.

Once such a presentation has been completed, if the entrepreneur fails to upload the completed presentation, the Analyst follows up to obtain the presentation as shown in step 309. Once a presentation has been
5 uploaded, the Associate or Analyst reviews the presentation and provides feedback as shown in step 311.

The Associate or Analyst then reviews a practice presentation with the entrepreneur as shown in step 313.

If the entrepreneur has not submitted a showcase, the
10 Associate or Analyst waits for one to submitted, as shown in step 315. When a showcase has been submitted, the entrepreneur can schedule a time for a live Brainshark presentation, as shown in step 317. The Analyst then confirms the time for the live presentation as shown in
15 step 319. The Analyst inputs the confirmed time into a database as in step 321. At the scheduled time, the Analyst oversees the live Brainshark presentation, as shown in step 323. Following the live presentation, the Analyst saves the recorded the Brainshark presentation
20 with the entrepreneur's showcase, as shown in step 325.

FIG. 3e also shows a similar option whereby only video is utilized.

FIG. 3f shows the relationship between the processes illustrated in FIG. 3d and FIG. 2c.

25 FIG. 3g illustrates the "featured deal" process. In step 351, a compiled list of deals is forwarded to deal team members for completion. A decision is then made as to whether each deal will be discussed in a weekly meeting. If it is decided that a deal will not be
30 discussed, the Associate marks the deal as "not discuss"

and includes reasons for the decision, as shown in step 353. The deal is then included in the weekly report as "not discuss" and is included in the group of deals to be considered the next week, as shown in step 355.

5 If a deal is selected for discussion, the Recommendation Form is then evaluated as shown in step 357. If the Recommendation Form has not been completed, the Associate or Analyst completes the commentary on the deal as shown in step 359. Alternatively, if the
10 Recommendation Form is found to be completed, the commentary is pulled from the Recommendation Form as shown in step 361.

 The deal is then examined to determine its status as a "featured deal" (i.e., an "A" deal) as shown in step
15 363. If the deal is not featured, the deal is included in the weekly report as shown in step 365. Otherwise, the Associate completes a two-page write-up on the deal as shown in step 367. The deal and the write-up are then included in the weekly report with a featured rating as
20 shown in step 369.

 The deals in the weekly report are reviewed at a weekly meeting as shown in step 371. Whether a deal should be a "featured deal" is then determined as shown in step 373. If the deal is determined not to be a
25 featured deal, the deal is monitored for "under review," "hot," or "due diligence" status after referral, as shown in step 375. If the entrepreneur has three or more investors interested in the deal, the deal is flagged as "featured" as shown in step 377. If not, the Associate
30 follows up with the entrepreneur as shown in FIG. 3f.

If the deal has flagged as featured, the Industry Analyst compiles a shortlist of providers to contact regarding the deal, as shown in step 379. The Industry Analyst then contacts providers, and indications of interest are recorded as "hot" prospects, as shown in step 381.

While particular elements, embodiments and applications of the present invention have been shown and described, it is understood that the invention is not limited thereto since modifications may be made by those skilled in the art, particularly in light of the foregoing teaching. It is therefore contemplated by the appended claims to cover such modifications and incorporate those features which come within the spirit and scope of the invention.

What is claimed is:

1. A method for using an electronic network to facilitate the matching of seekers and providers of capital comprising the steps of:

5 receiving seeker-specific criteria from a plurality of seekers;

storing said seeker-specific criteria as seeker records in a database;

10 receiving provider-specific criteria from a plurality of providers;

storing said provider-specific criteria as provider records in said database;

15 matching said seekers with said providers by comparing said seeker-specific criteria in said seeker records with said provider-specific criteria in said provider records.

2. The method of claim 1 wherein said method further comprises using a plurality of computers to carry out one or more of the steps of claim 1.

20

3. The method of claim 2 wherein at least one of the steps of claim 2 are carried out over a worldwide global computer network.

25

4. The method of claim 2 wherein said seekers and said providers are business entities seeking a merger.

5. The method of claim 2 wherein said seekers and said providers are entities seeking to enter a leveraged

30

buy-out.

6. The method of claim 2 wherein said provider is a professional service provider.

5

7. The method of claim 2 wherein said provider-specific criteria in said provider records are not accessible by said seekers.

10

8. The method of claim 2 wherein said seekers can prevent one or more of said providers from accessing said seeker records.

15

9. The method of claim 2 wherein said method further includes the step of selectively providing a subset of said seeker records to said providers, said subset consisting of said seeker records that match the provider-specific criteria of the respective provider.

20

10. The method of claim 2 wherein said seeker records include multimedia information descriptive of said seekers.

25

11. The method of claim 10 wherein said provider records include multimedia information descriptive of said providers.

12. The method of claim 10 wherein said method further includes the step of selectively providing a subset of said multimedia-containing seeker records to said providers, said subset consisting of said
5 multimedia-containing seeker records that match the provider-specific criteria of the respective provider.

13. The method of claim 10 wherein said method further includes the step of presenting one of said
10 multimedia-containing seeker records to a subset of said providers simultaneously, said subset consisting of said providers who desire to view said presentation of the respective seeker.

14. The method of claim 1 wherein said method further includes seeker-feedback means for providing said
15 seekers with feedback regarding said seeker-specific criteria.

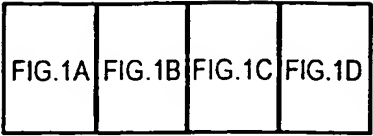
15. The method of claim 1 wherein said method further includes provider-feedback means for providing
20 said providers with feedback regarding said provider-specific criteria.

16. The method of claim 10 wherein said method further includes seeker-multimedia-feedback means for
25 providing said seekers with feedback regarding said multimedia-containing seeker records.

17. The method of claim 11 wherein said method
30

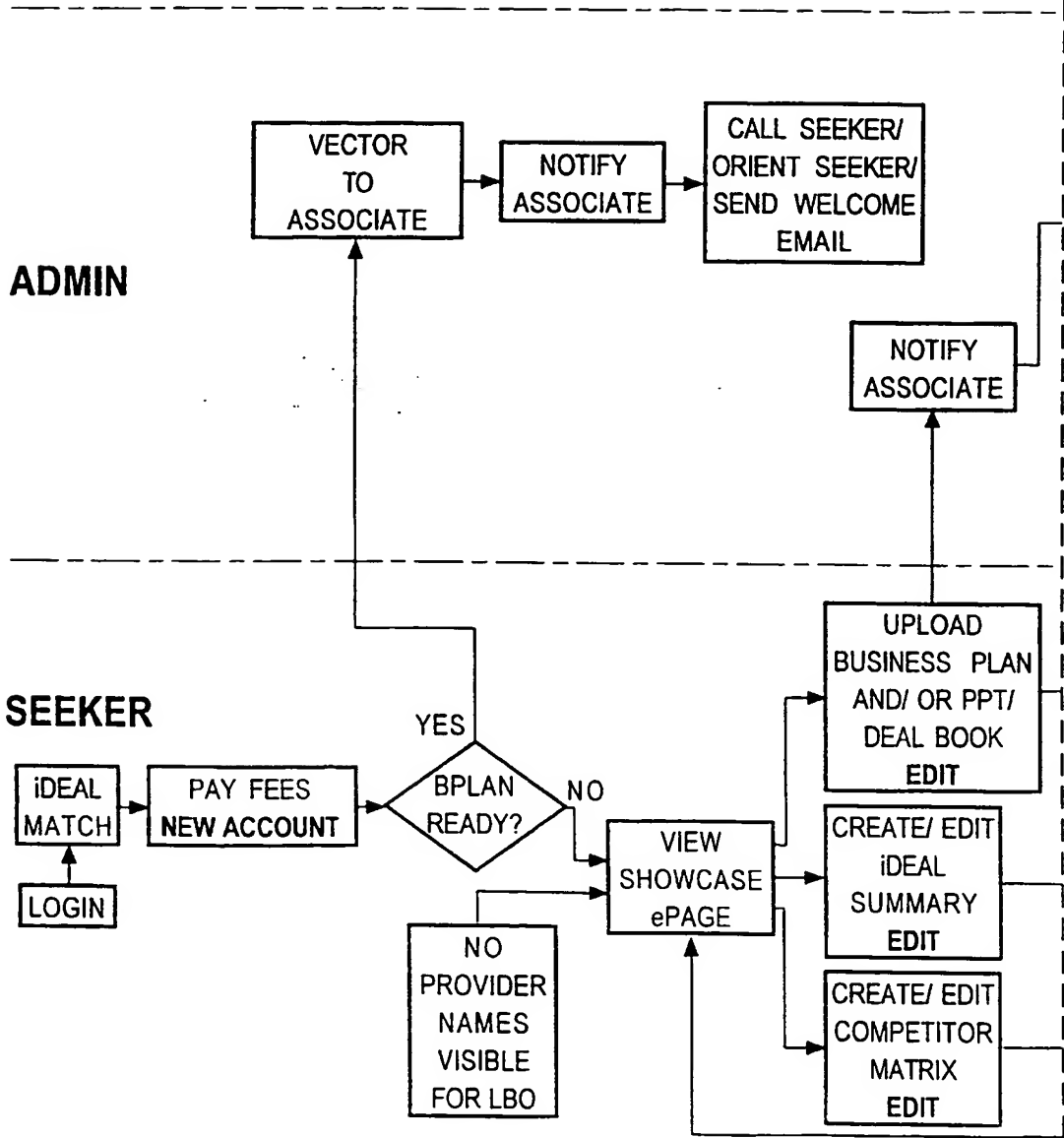
further includes provider-multimedia-feedback means for providing said providers with feedback regarding said multimedia-containing provider records.

FIG. 1



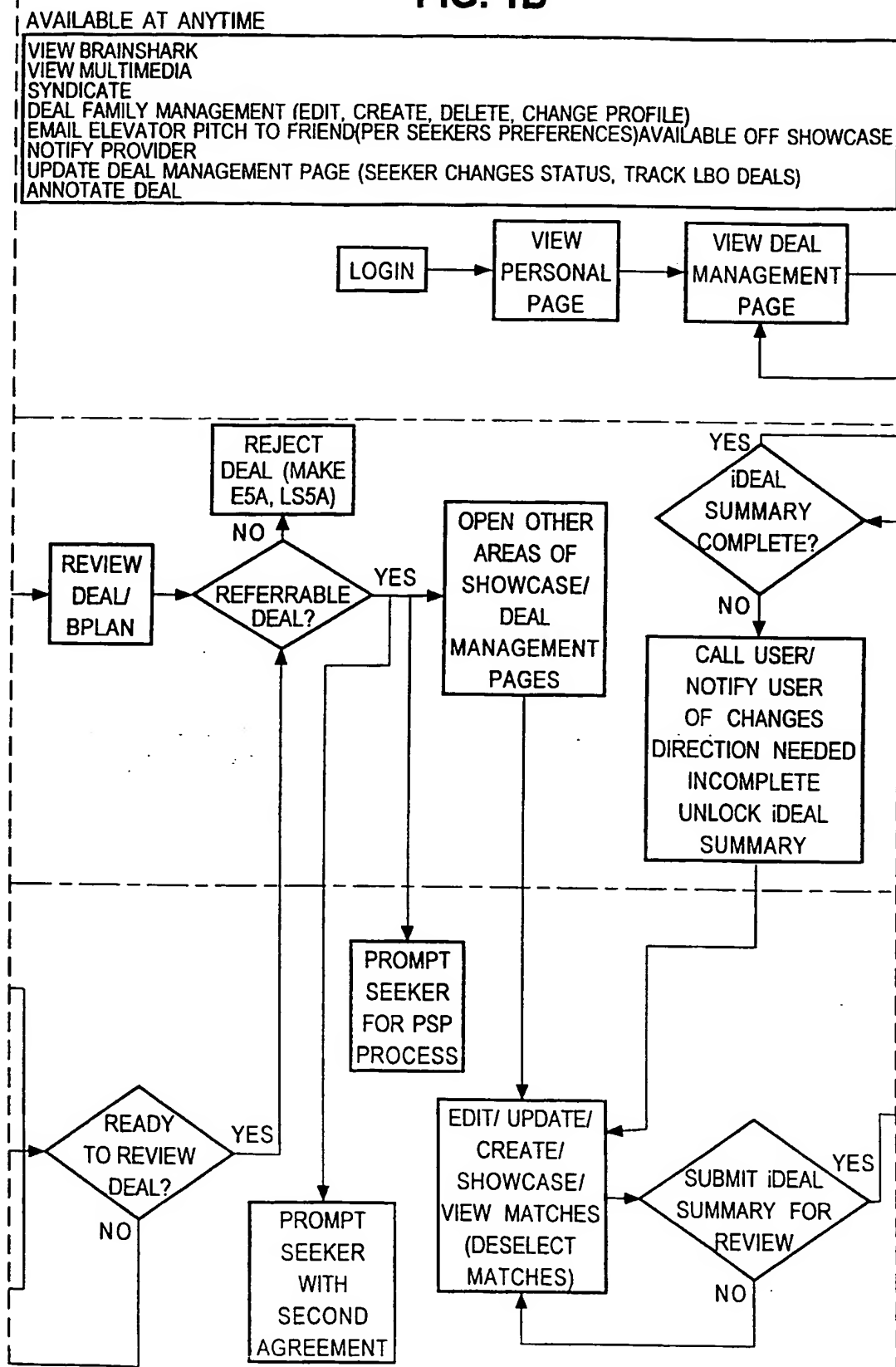
PROVIDER

FIG. 1A



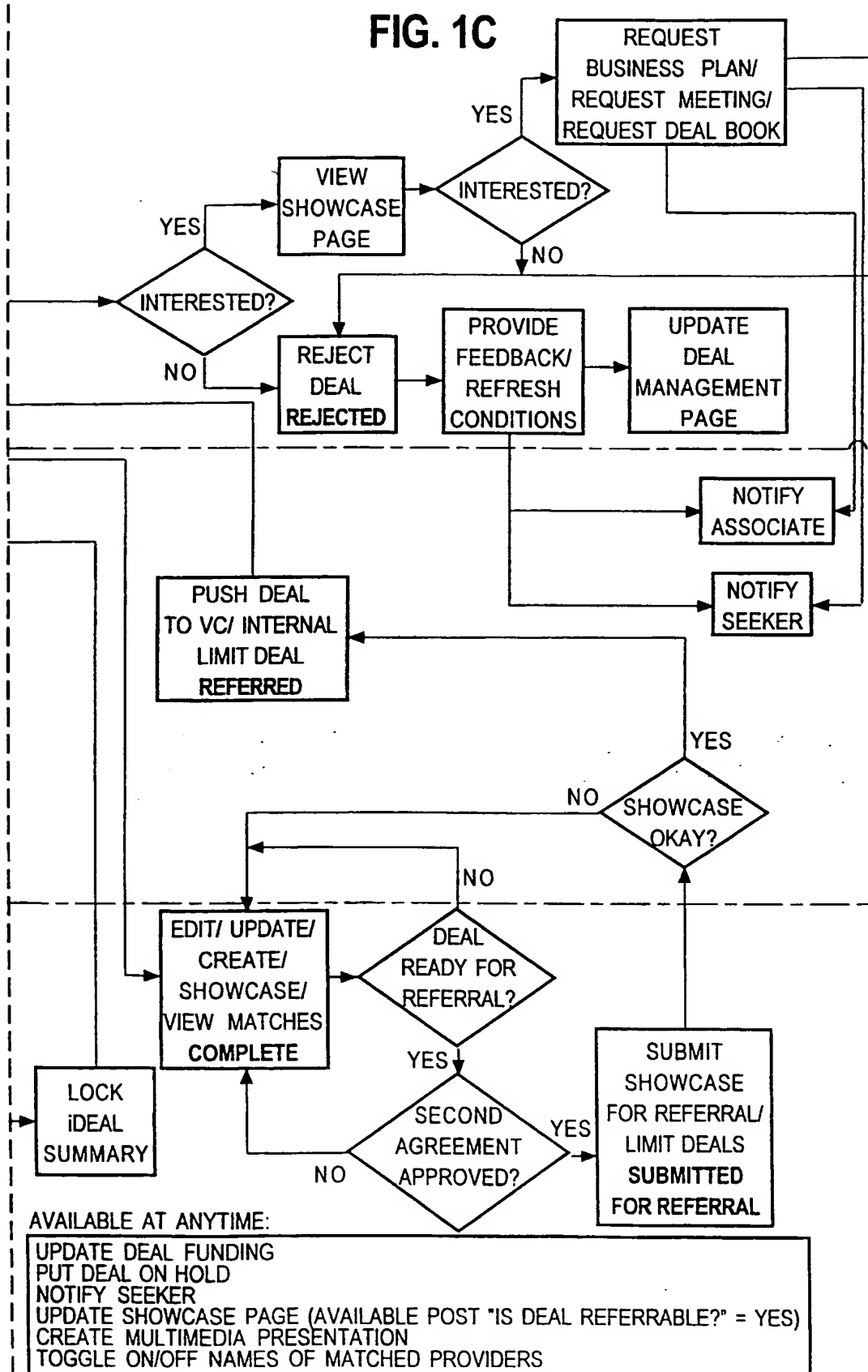
2/14

FIG. 1B



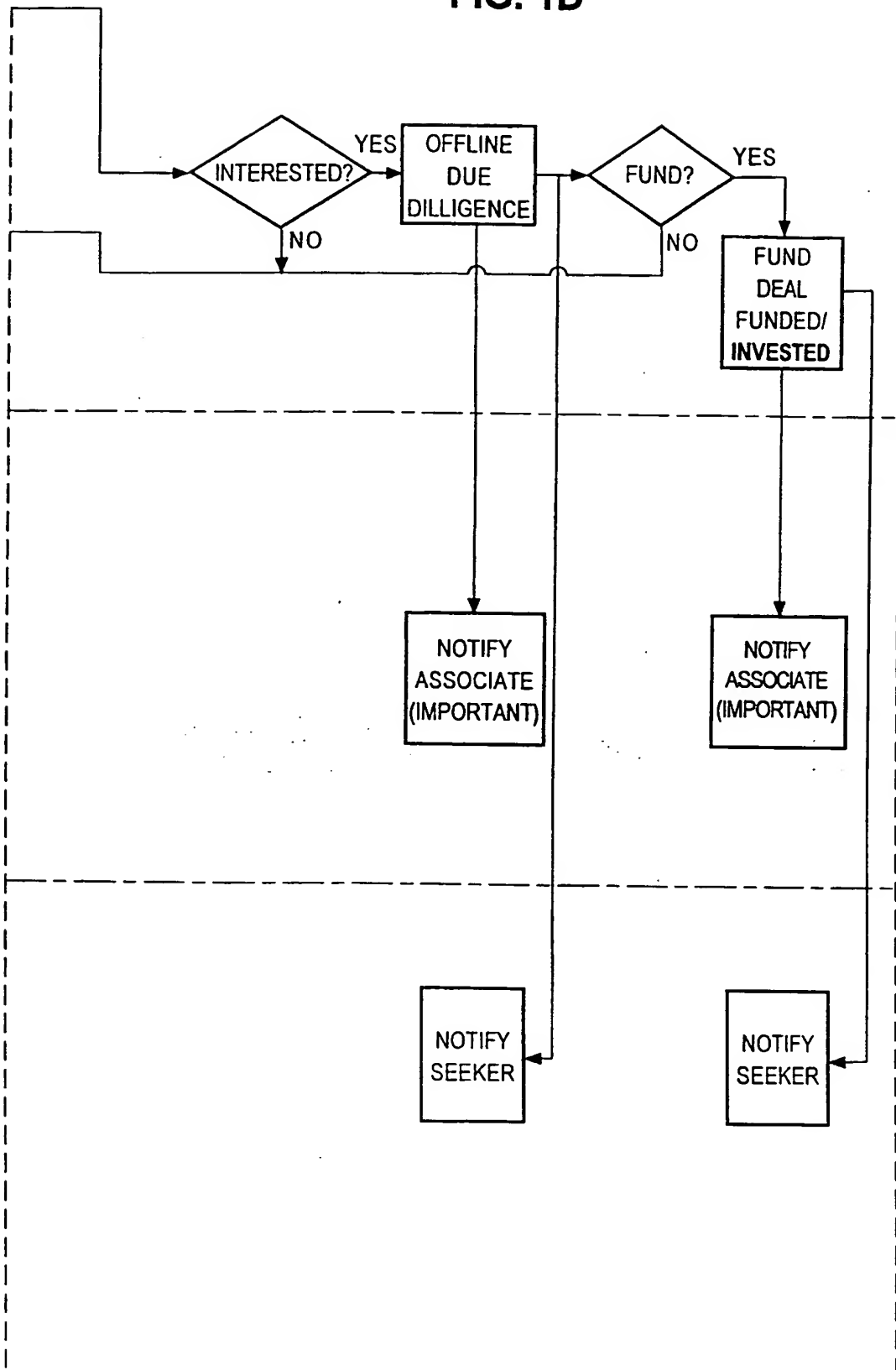
3/14

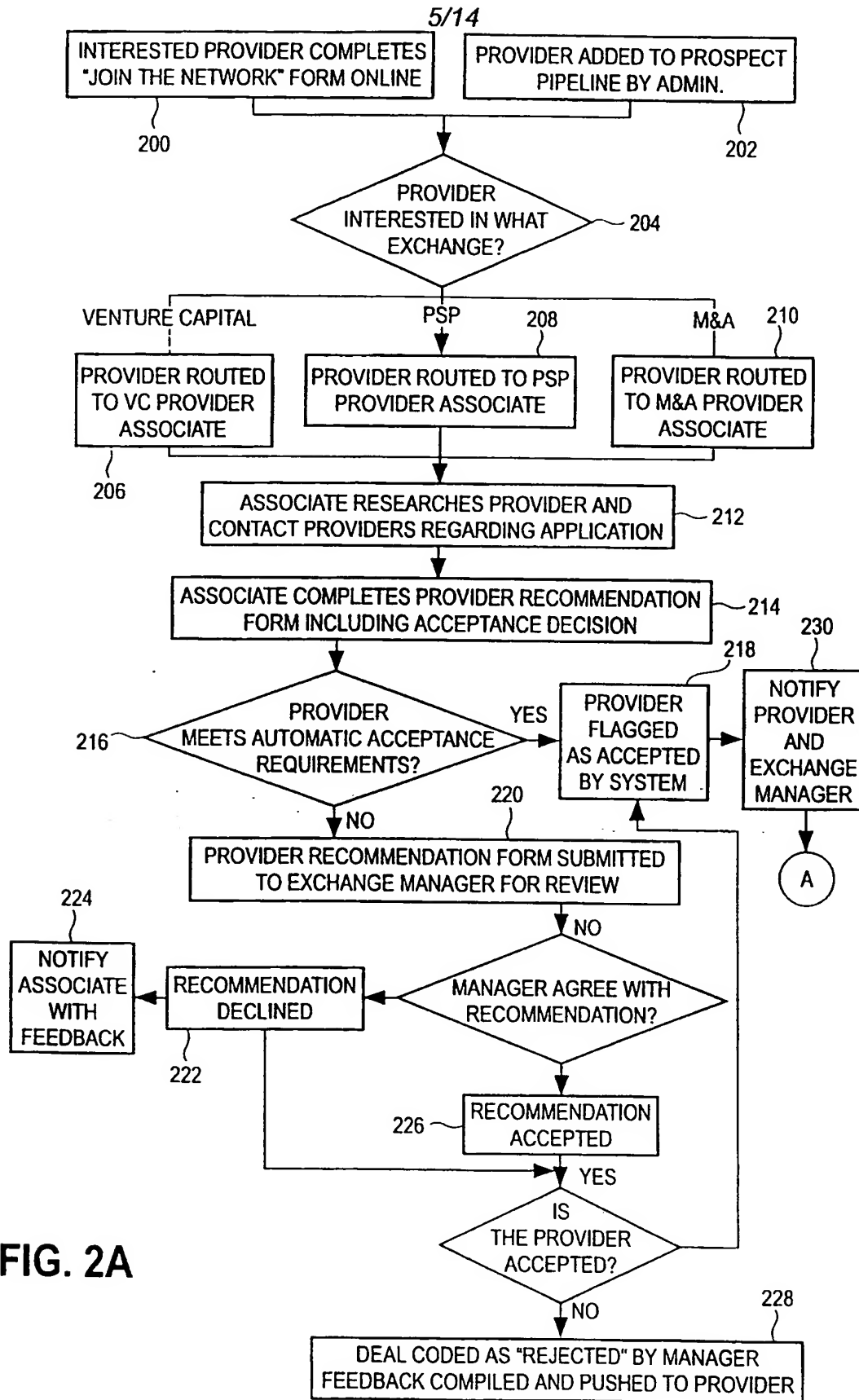
FIG. 1C



4/14

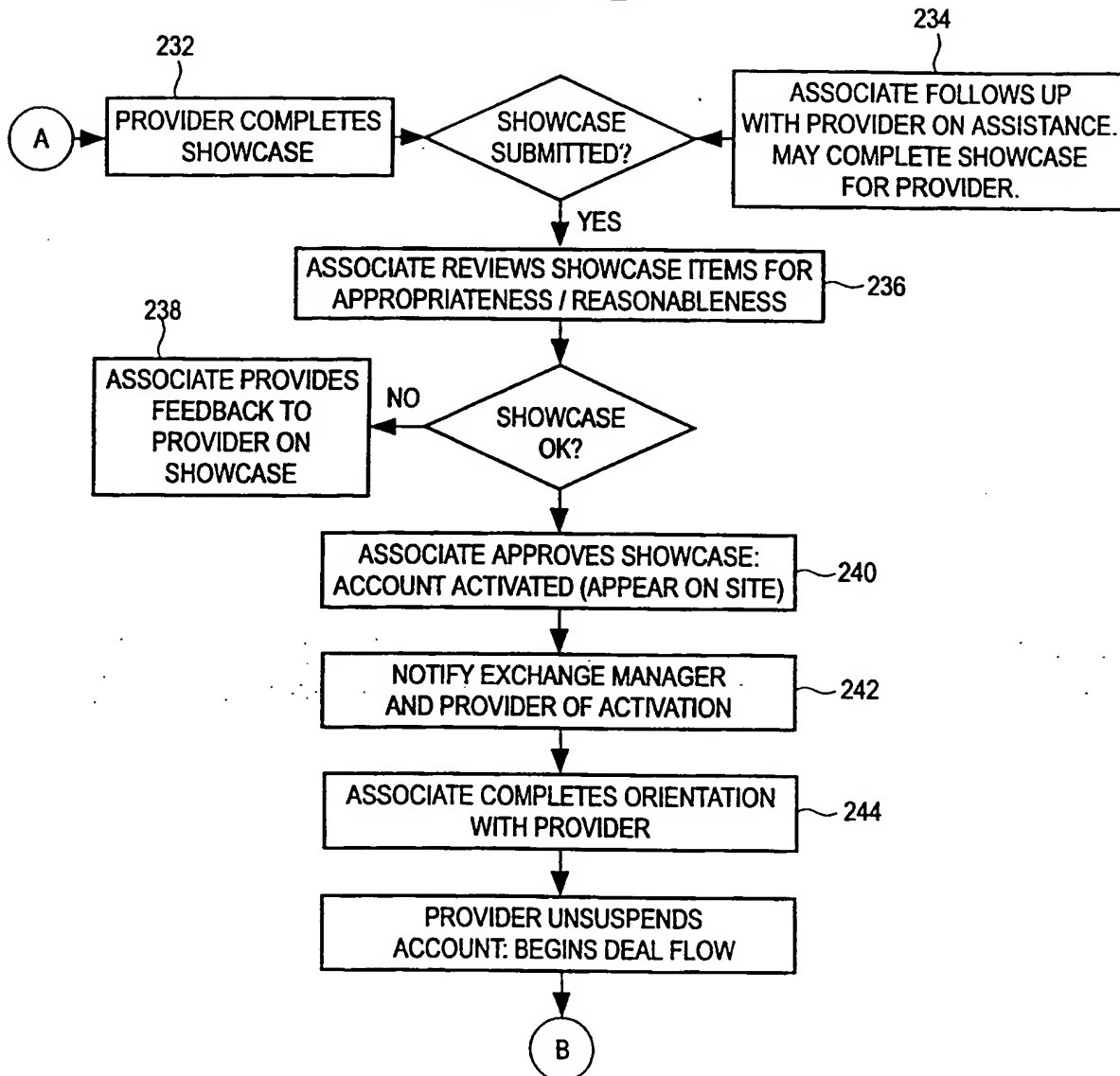
FIG. 1D





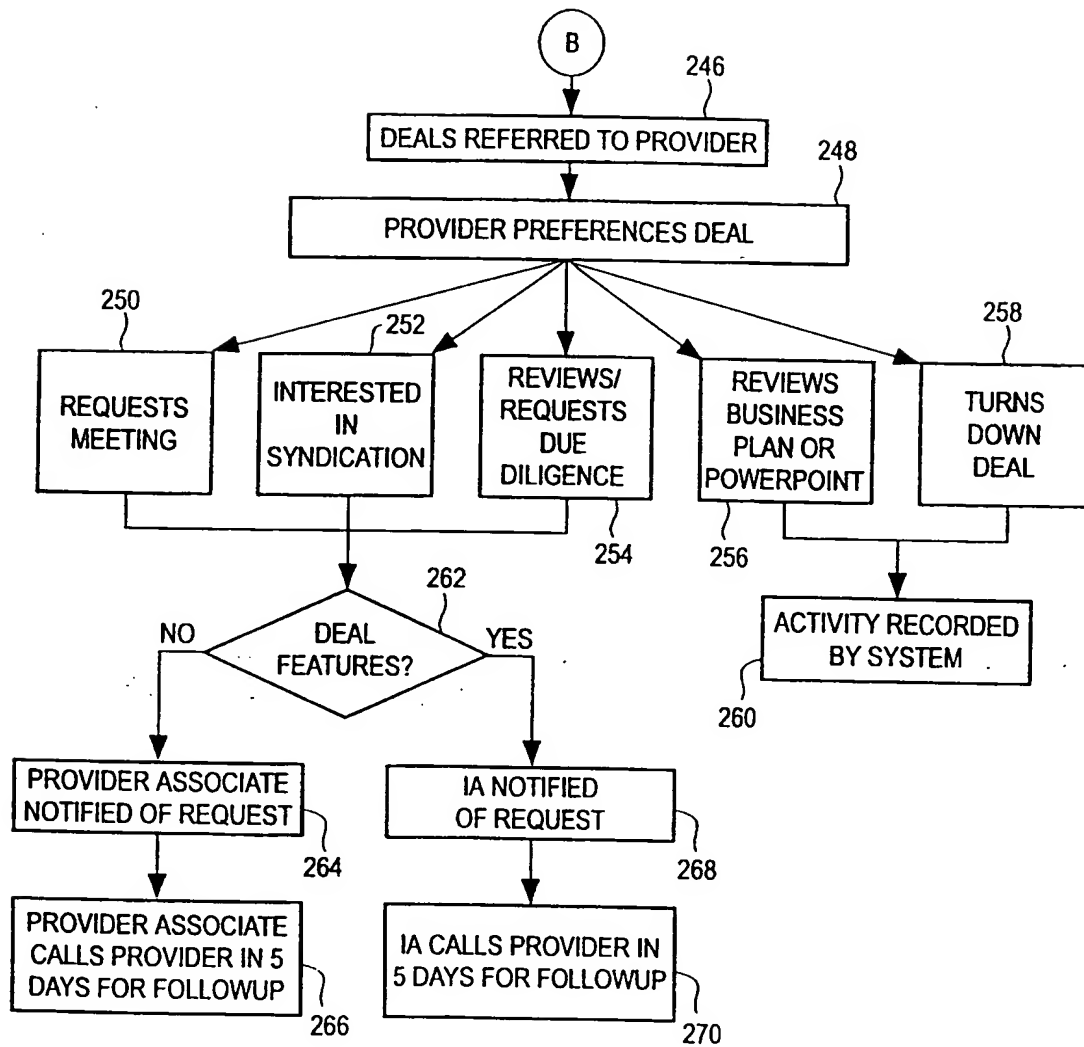
6/14

FIG. 2B



7/14

FIG. 2C



8/14
FIG. 3A

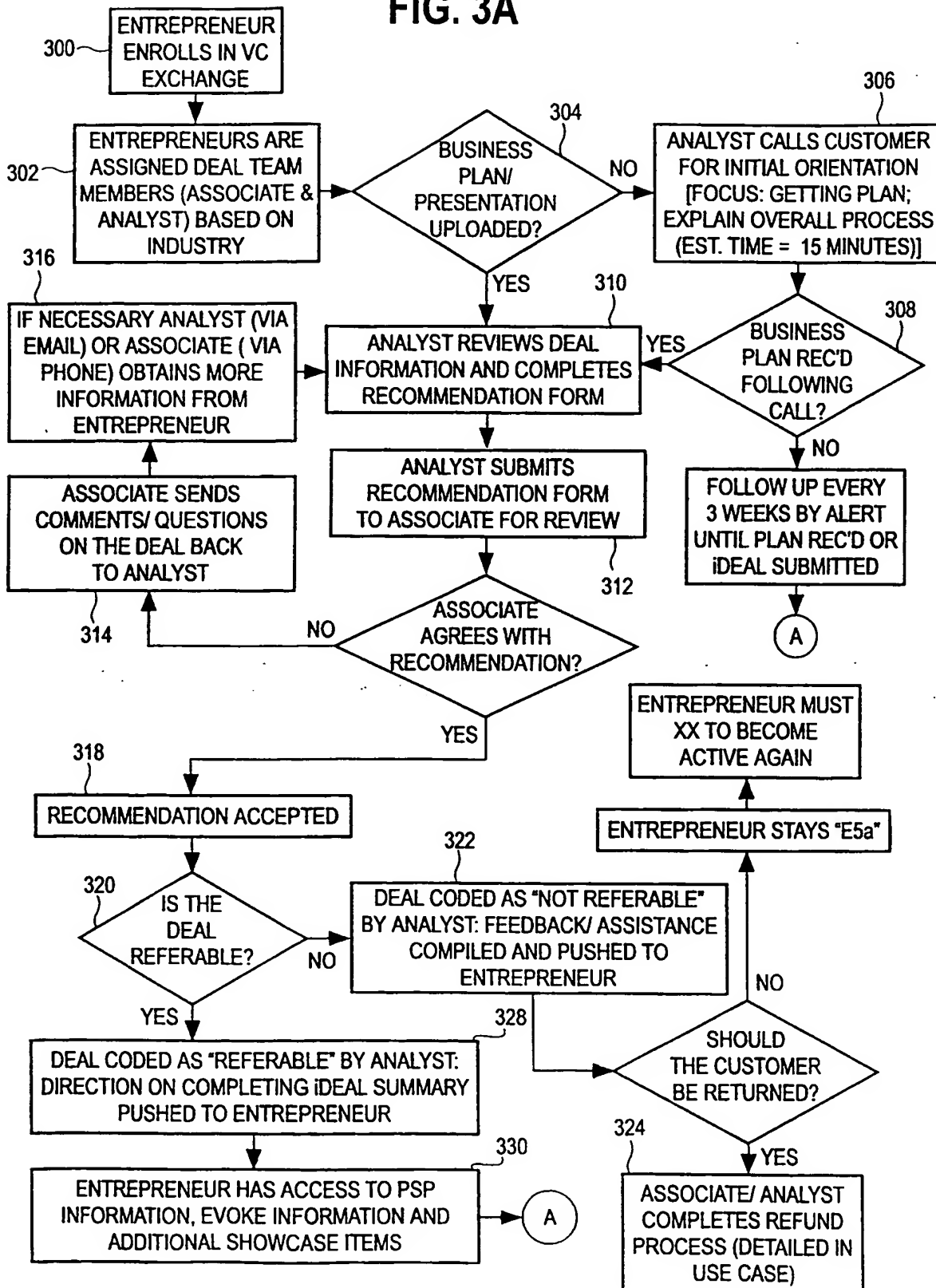
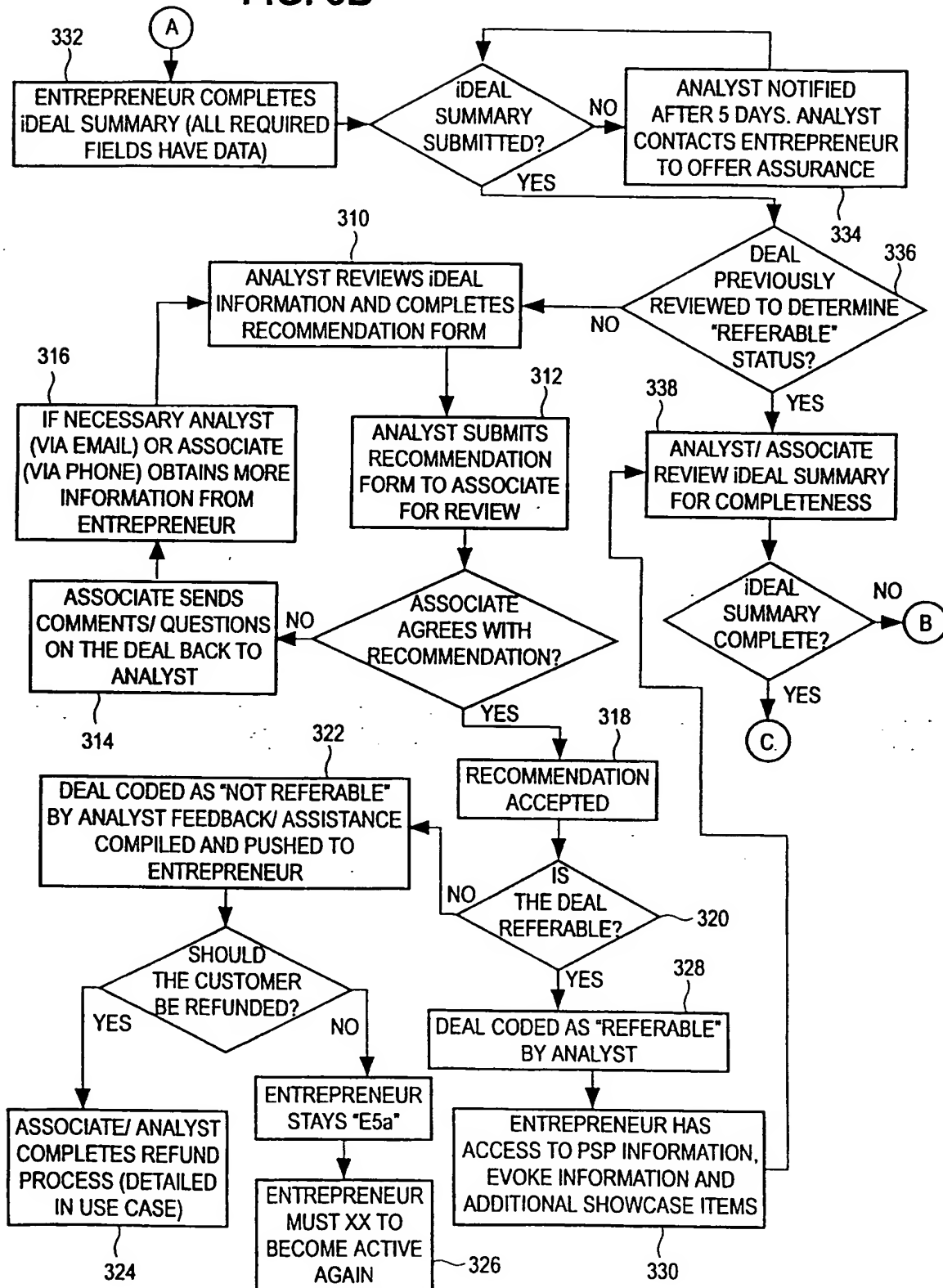


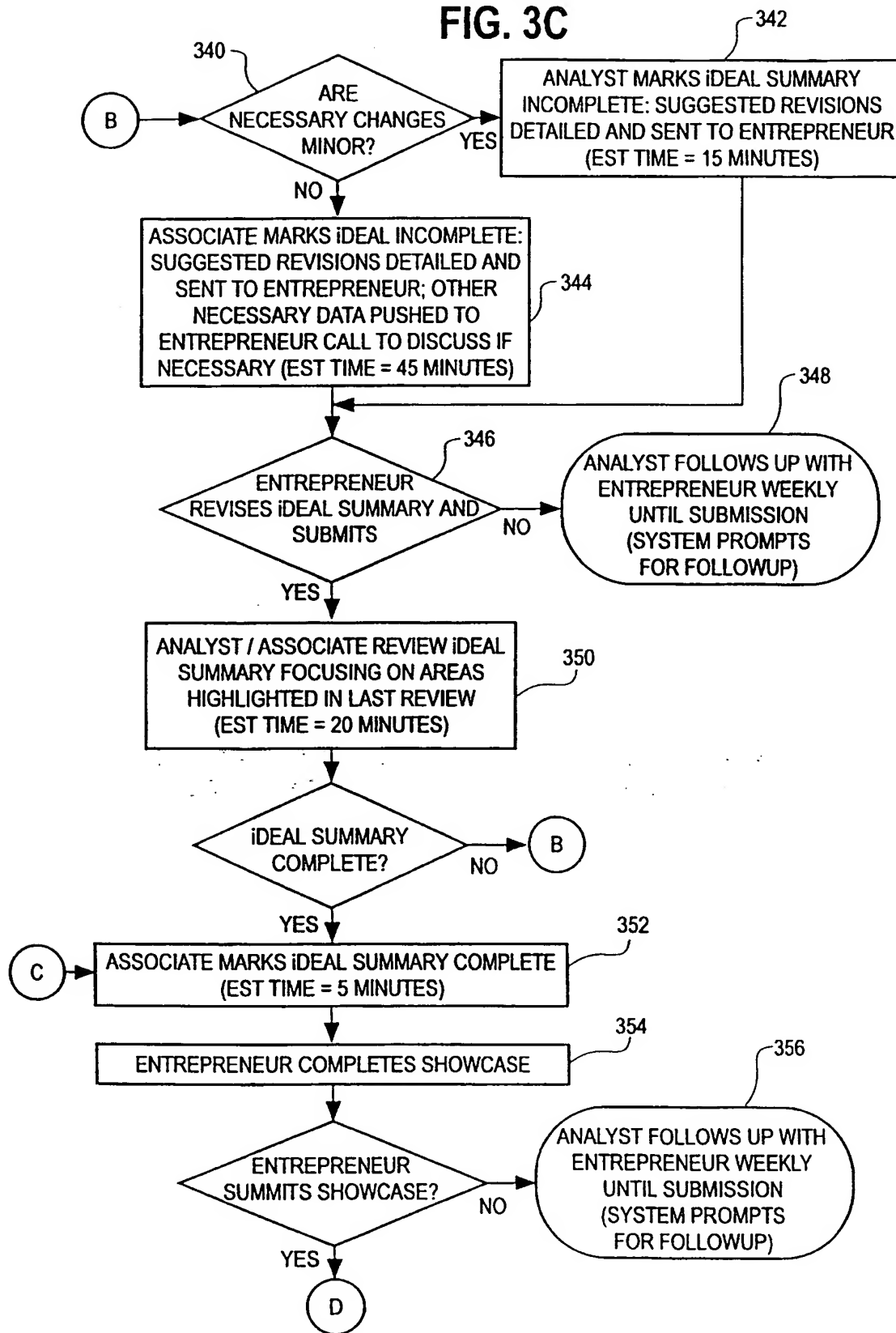
FIG. 3B

9/14



10/14

FIG. 3C



11/14

FIG. 3D

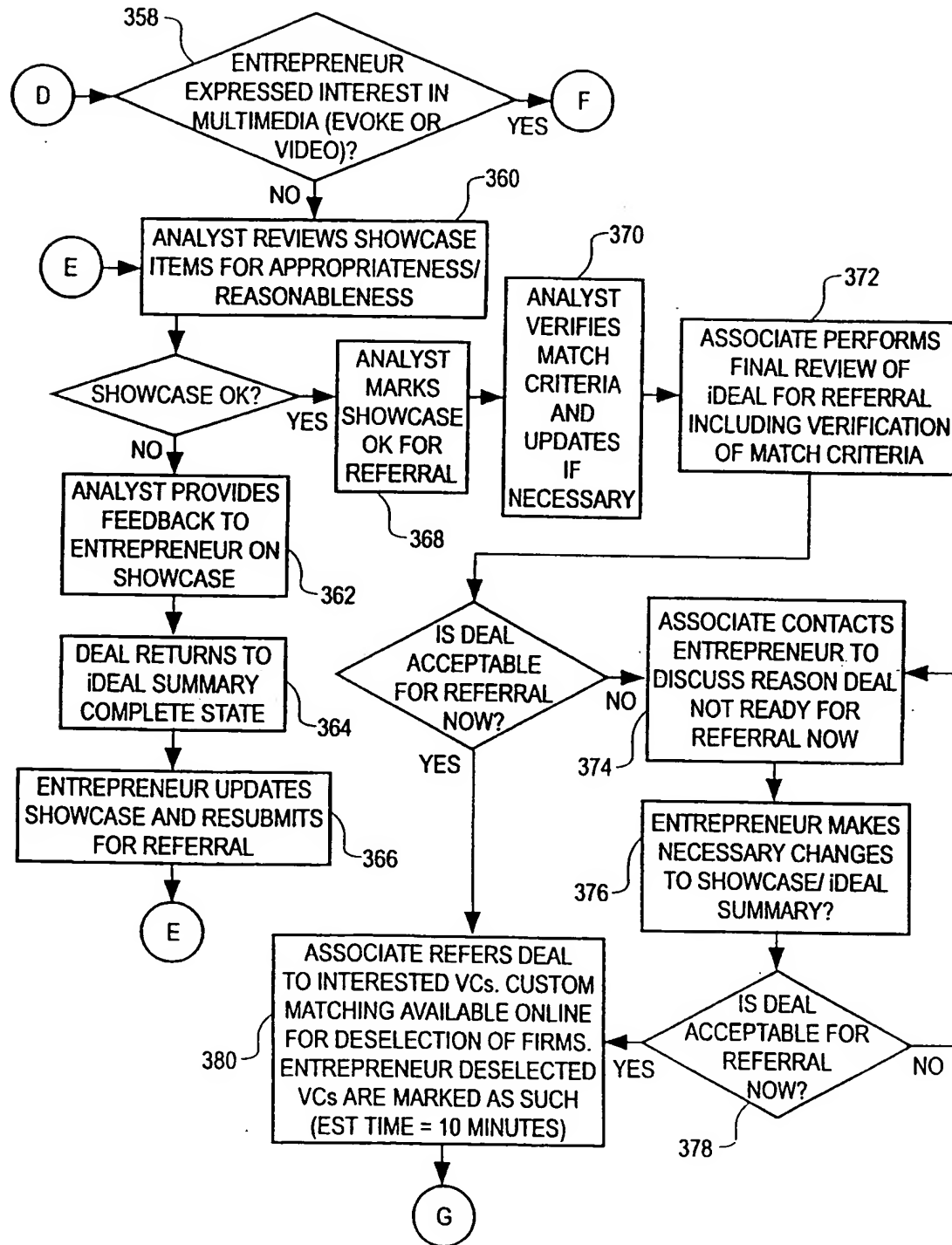
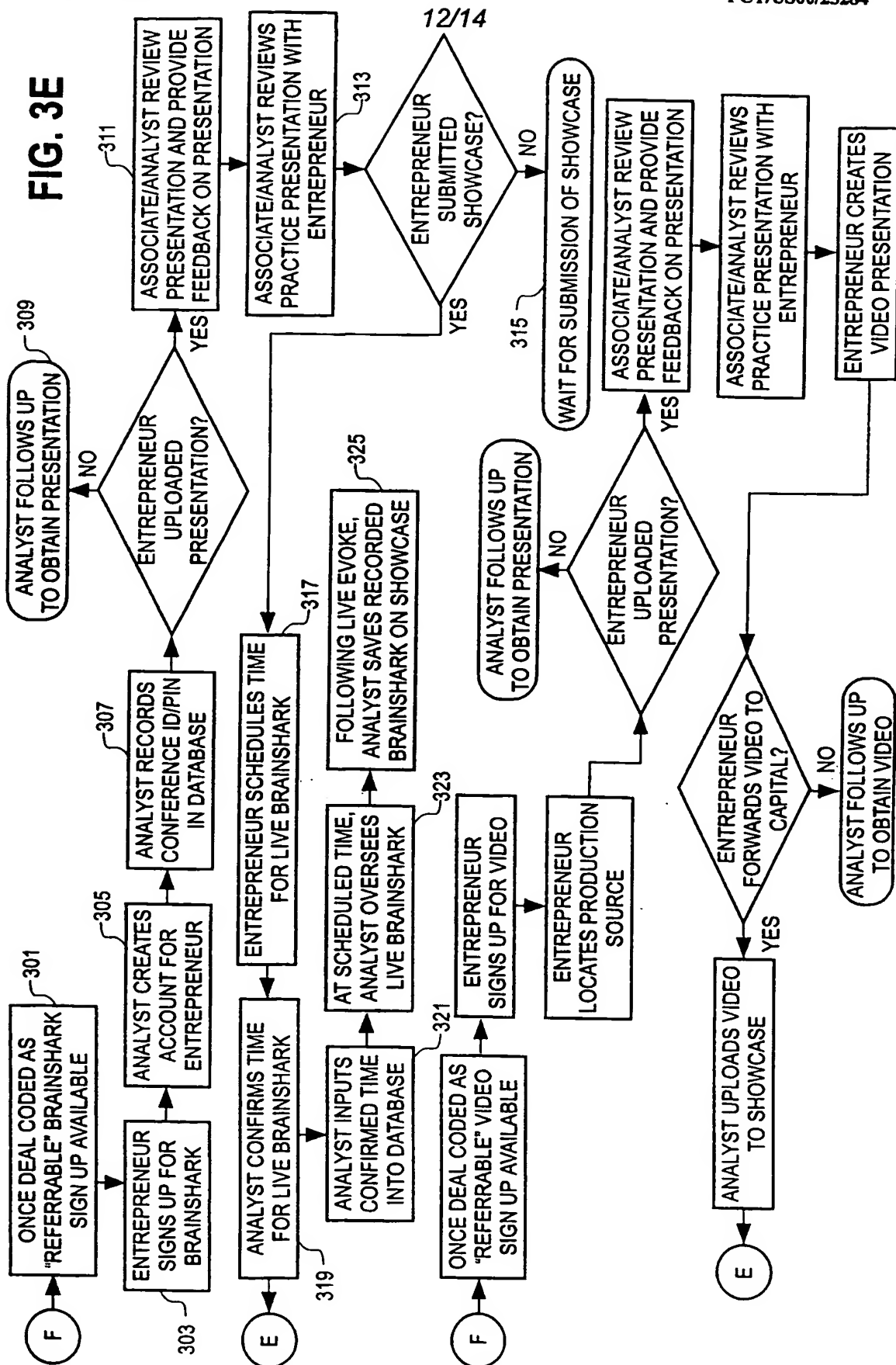
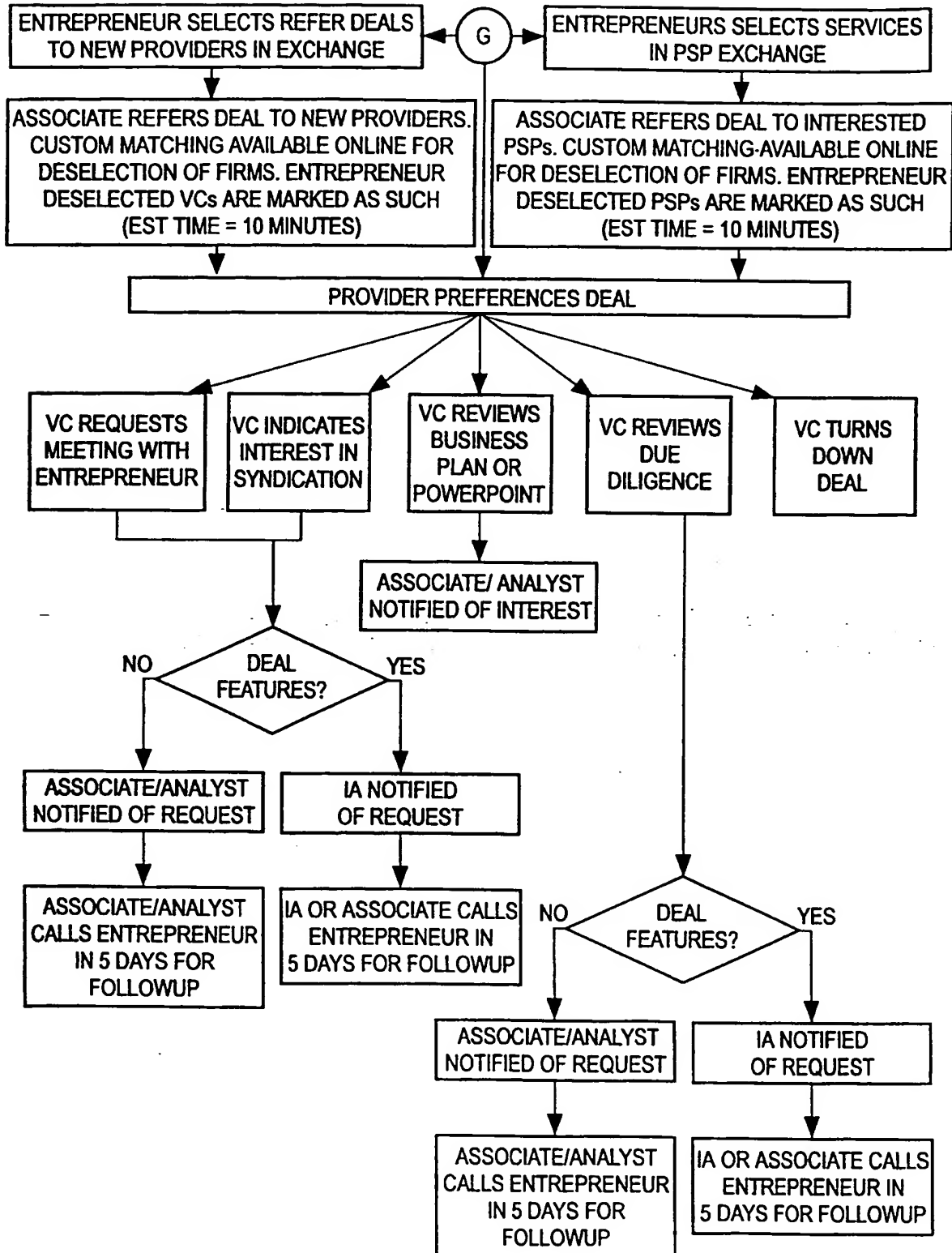


FIG. 3E



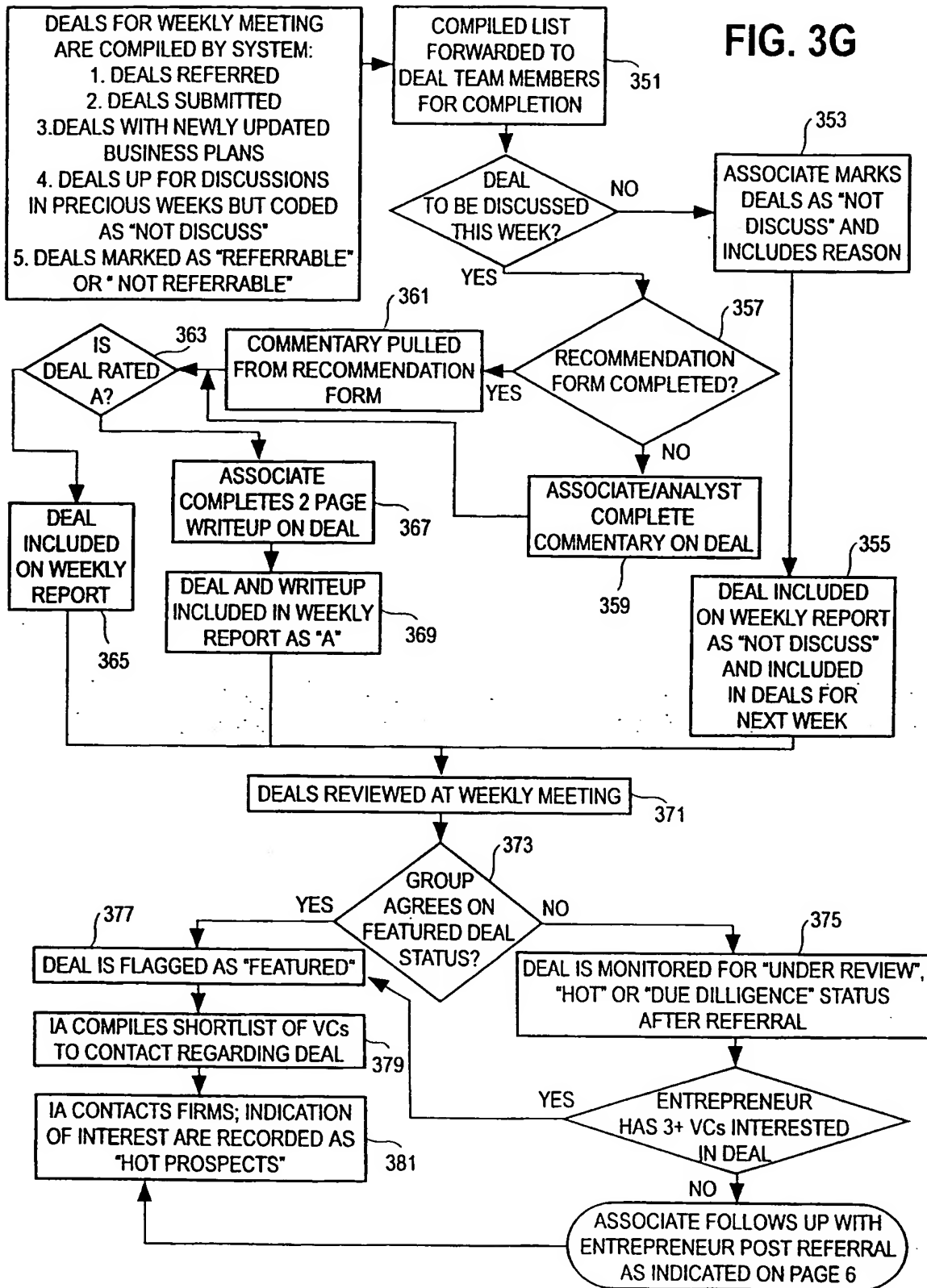
13/14

FIG. 3F



14/14

FIG. 3G



INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No.

PCT-US00:25284

A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER

IPC(7) :G06F 17/60

US CL :705/1, 14, 26, 27, 35, 37

According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both national classification and IPC

B. FIELDS SEARCHED

Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols)

U.S. : 705/1, 14, 26, 27, 37

Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched

Electronic data base consulted during the international search (name of data base and, where practicable, search terms used)

STN. WEST. EAST

search terms: matching, seeker, provider, buyer, seller, customer, merchant, network, Internet, etc.

C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category*	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
X	US 5,664,115 A (FRASER) 02 September 1997, col. 4-10	1-17
A	US 5,950,177 A (LUPIEN et al) 07 September 1999, col. 5-14	1-17
A	US 5,845,266 A (LUPIEN et al) 01 December 1998, col. 6-20	1-17
A	US 5,077,665 A (SILVERMAN et al) 31 December 1991, col. 4-16	1-17
A	US 5,136,501 A (SILVERMAN et al) 04 August 1992, col. 3-22	1-17
A	US 5,924,082 A (SILVERMAN et al) 13 July 1999, col. 6-12	1-17

☐ Further documents are listed in the continuation of Box C.
 ☐ See patent family annex.

* Special categories of cited documents	*T* later document published after the international filing date or priority date and not in conflict with the application but cited to understand the principle or theory underlying the invention
A document defining the general state of the art which is not considered to be of particular relevance	*X* document of particular relevance, the claimed invention cannot be considered novel or cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is taken alone
E earlier document published on or after the international filing date	*Y* document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is combined with one or more other such documents, such combination being obvious to a person skilled in the art
L document which may throw doubts on priority claim(s) or which is cited to establish the publication date of another citation or other special reason (as specified)	*A* document member of the same patent family
O document referring to an oral disclosure, use, exhibition or other means	
P document published prior to the international filing date but later than the priority date claimed	

Date of the actual completion of the international search 15 NOVEMBER 2000	Date of mailing of the international search report 29 DEC 2000
Name and mailing address of the ISA/US Commissioner of Patents and Trademarks Box PCT Washington, D.C. 20231 Facsimile No. (703) 305-3230	Authorized officer VINCENT A. MILLIN Telephone No. (703) 308-1065